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EMPLOYMENT POSSIBILITIES IN THE ALASKAN FISHING INDUSTRY

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During World War II there was a serious shortage of manpower in the fishing industry in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska; however, that condition no longer exists. As a result, inexperienced personnel must now compete for jobs with experienced workers whose capabilities are known to the employers. Obviously, applicants with special skills stand a better chance of obtaining jobs than do inexperienced ones.

In recent years, it has been necessary to impose rigid regulations in the interests of conservation of the Alaskan fisheries. These regulations have reduced the fishing effort by shortening seasons, curtailing fishing gear, and closing certain areas to commercial fishing. A number of canneries have consolidated their operations as a result of this regulatory action, which has further decreased the employment possibilities.

Hiring of new personnel is generally done on a personal interview basis. This applies both to cannery help and to help on fishing vessels. Because of this fact, applicants from the States should not come to Alaska seeking work but should arrange for an interview with the company selected at their Seattle headquarters. If an applicant wishes to take a chance on coming to Alaska to find work, sufficient funds should be available to make the return trip if work is not available. An applicant coming to Alaska should remember that in addition to the expensive transportation, the cost of food and lodging is from 25 to 30 percent higher than similar necessities in the States.

All persons traveling to and from Alaska must be able to comply with the regulations of the McCarran Act of 1952. This act requires that all persons entering the United States from Alaska pass through immigration inspection upon their arrival. For this reason, anyone seeking employment in Alaska should make sure that he has proper identification before leaving the continental United States.

For work either on fishing vessels or in canneries, union membership is an asset, although the Taft-Hartley law permits employment subject to later union membership where "union shop" contracts are negotiated. Most branches of Alaska's fishing industry are unionized.

For information on employment in Alaska in general, applicants may write to the Alaska Territorial Employment Service at Juneau, Alaska, or Box 159, Ketchikan, Alaska. Applicants should be aware that there is an increasing pressure on Alaskan industries to consider Alaskan citizens first before hiring outside help.

Alaska is not the untouched wilderness many people believe. Although there are still many undeveloped fishery resources, the majority of these require the expenditure of large amounts of capital for exploitation. Principal undeveloped fisheries include shellfish, such as crabs, shrimp and clams, and bottomfish. Salmon and halibut are being fished to the limit at present, and herring are now being fully exploited on all known fishing grounds.

Employment in Salmon Canneries

There is no central employment agency for cannery workers, either in the United States or in Alaska. Each cannery does its own hiring. Applicants living in the States are mostly hired in Seattle. Those residing in the Territory are hired locally. Hiring is done from about March to May of each year. Letters of application should be addressed to the individual company. Applicants should give age, physical condition, training, working experience, and any other qualifications. A list of salmon canners can be obtained upon request from the Director, Fish and Wildlife Service, U. S. Department of the Interior, Washington 25, D. C., or from field offices of the Service at Juneau and Ketchikan, Alaska, or at 2725 Montlake Boulevard, Seattle 2, Washington.

Workers hired in Seattle, Washington and in outlying areas in Alaska are provided transportation and traveltime pay at the expense of the cannery. Most canneries provide monthly employees with room and board. Where these are not provided, the employee usually receives additional subsistence compensation. Most cannery workers receive two to five month's employment (summer and early fall).

Wage rates for cannery employment are subject to revision each season, through negotiations between the labor unions and the cannery operators. Salaries for some of the various classes of employees during the 1955 season are as follows (board, room, and transportation are furnished in addition; overtime is usually paid for all work in excess of 8 hours per day):

Craftsmen

Cannery foreman: $4358.80 per season of 3 months and 10 days. No overtime is paid.

1st Machinist: $2372.80 per season and $3.57 per hour overtime.

Carpenter: $535.60 per month and $3.40 per hour overtime. Carpenter foreman is paid $25.00 per month more than regular carpenter.

Re-former man: $1980.48 per season and $3.57 per hour overtime.

Machinist helper: $1231.01 per season and $2.28 per hour overtime.

Combination salmon cook and pipefitter: $1980.48 per season and $3.57 per hour overtime.

Salmon cook: $1568.58 per season and $2.28 per hour overtime.

Outside Crews

Trap watchman: $349.73 per month and $2.28 per hour overtime.

Deckhand: $349.73 per month and $2.28 per hour overtime.

Wireman: Same pay as trap watchman (usually serve as trap watchman when traps are installed).

Tender captain: $449.34 per month and $2.28 per hour overtime.

Web man: $369.32 per month and $2.28 per hour overtime.

Culinary Workers

Cannery cook: $423.90 per month and $2.28 per hour overtime. Culinary workers receive 8 hours overtime on Sundays and holidays.

Waitress and dishwasher: $300.25 per month plus $2.28 per hour overtime.

Cannery Workers (Monthly Workers)

Slimer, cooler loader, retort, casing machine, etc: $280.67 per month and $1.75 per hour overtime, 2 months' guarantee.

Hourly workers (mostly local women): $1.93 per hour straight time, $2.19 overtime, $2.41 penalty time after 10:00 p.m. This rate of pay is applied against a minimum seasonal guarantee of $394.87. (Meals and lodging are not furnished to hourly workers). Uniforms, boots, aprons,

Hourly workers (Contd.):

and gloves are furnished by the company, and 15-minute coffee periods are provided in both morning and afternoon. (Opportunity for such employment is limited to the actual canning period of about 1 to 2 months).

Other

In addition to the classified workers, a certain number of unskilled laborers are hired to work in either the canneries, cold storage, or the regular fish docks. Persons without any experience are paid an hourly rate of $2.45 per hour until they have had 60 days of working experience. After 60 days of experience, the hourly rate is advanced to $2.55 per hour, for a 48-hour work week, with the exception of Ketchikan, Alaska, where a 40-hour work week prevails. Time and one-half is paid for overtime.

Employment on Fishing Vessels

Although high earnings often are made in fishing, in most cases the hours are long, the work is hard, and the income is moderate. Very often the fishermen actually lose money when the fishing or the marketing conditions are poor. Furthermore, with inexperienced workers, seasickness may be a problem. Usually the hiring is done by direct interview with the captain of each individual fishing vessel. The reluctance of the captain to hire inexperienced personnel is not surprising in view of the fact that the crew on a fishing vessel must be a well integrated team if the fishing is to pay. A "green" hand is often an hindrance rather than a help. Captains with good catch records are always able to obtain excellent, fully experienced crews; those who have a record of mediocre earnings often must hire some inexperienced persons. Thus anyone planning on entering the fishery for the first time must anticipate difficulty in obtaining employment and, even if successful in getting a job, may experience poor earnings. Information concerning employment on Alaskan fishing vessels is given in Table 1:

Table 1 - Information Concerning Employment on Alaskan Fishing Vessels

Kind of Vessel	Ownership of Vessel	No. of Men in Crew	Basis of Pay	Whom to see for Employment
Salmon:				
Trolling	Individuals	1-2	Shares	Captain
Gillnet	Canneries or Individuals	1-2	Fish Caught on Shares	Canning Co. or Captain
Purse Seine	Individuals	4-9	Shares	Captain
Herring:				
Purse Seine	Individuals or Reduction Plants	7-10	Shares	Captain
Halibut 1/	Individuals	3-7	Shares	Captain
Otter Trawl 2/	Individuals	4-6	Shares	Captain

1/ Most profitable fishery but the most difficult to enter.
2/ Used to catch bottom fish. This fishery has not been fully developed in Alaska.

Employment in Other Fishery Industries

Opportunities for employment in cold-storage plants, herring-reduction plants, and other branches of Alaska's fisheries are much less numerous than those in salmon canneries and the accompanying fishing activities. Since the operators usually hire employees by personal interview, the prospective worker should write for a list of "Alaska fishery operators other than salmon canners."

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